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East Asia Biweekly Review

4 April 1978

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EAST ASIA BIWEEKLY REVIEW

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North Korea: Criticism of Carter; A Warning to China

Departing from its earlier treatment of the Carter administration, North Korea last week issued an extensive indictment of US foreign policy that criticizes President Carter repeatedly and by name. Pyongyang's broadside partly reflects dissatisfaction with the slow pace of US military withdrawal from South Korea and with its own inability to mobilize greater international support for a speedier and more complete US military disengagement. Pyongyang also seems to be expressing concern that differences between China and the USSR might further dilute Communist opposition to the US--a warning that is particularly significant in view of press reports that Chinese party leader Hua Kuo-feng may soon visit North Korea.

During the course of the recent 11-day US - South Korean maneuvers--dubbed "Team Spirit-78"--Pyongyang roundly criticized the exercise for increasing tensions on the Korean Peninsula. By avoiding personal criticism of President Carter, however, Pyongyang maintained the sense of moderation that had characterized its approach to Washington since the US announcement of a withdrawal of its ground force from South Korea.

An editorial article in the North Korean party daily on 28 March was the first significant departure from this restrained line. Asserting that "as days go by, Carter's deeds do not agree with his words," the article claimed that the United States is actually building up its military strength and that of the South Koreans under the "smokescreen" of withdrawal.

The article also criticized the United States for using such tactics as food, arms sales, and pressure in the human rights sector to foment trouble abroad and promote conflicts among Third World countries. It asserted that the United States hopes to "split and disintegrate" the nonaligned movement and weaken the overall "anti-imperialist" struggle.

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Pyongyang is aware that the announcement of the US troop withdrawal and the growing economic and diplomatic strength of South Korea have undercut much of North Korea's international appeal, and it is anxious to prevent any further erosion. In February and March of this year it dispatched a number of high-level dignitaries to various countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Over the years North Korea has seen Chinese and Soviet support for North Korea's anti-US efforts diminish as the Sino-Soviet conflict has deepened. In calling attention to the "unchanging nature" of US imperialism, Pyongyang may be sending a message to its socialist allies.

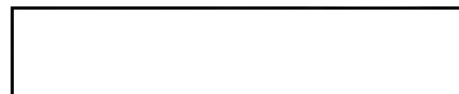
One passage in the editorial article, which stated that "US imperialism is the number one target of the struggle of the world people," will be especially discomforting to Peking, since in Chinese eyes, the Soviet Union long ago displaced the US as the "number one" enemy. Significantly, Peking deleted this passage in its rebroadcast of the North Korean article on 30 March.

According to recent reports from Peking, Chinese party chairman and Premier Hua Kuo-feng will travel to Pyongyang in late spring or early summer--his first trip abroad since taking over the leadership in 1976. North Korean President Kim Il-song is certain to use the visit to probe for China's current view of the United States.
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Vietnam-Cambodia: Border Dispute

Recent reports [redacted] suggest that the Vietnamese may be training a Cambodian resistance force to fight the present Phnom Penh regime. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Vietnamese are recruiting persons with military backgrounds both from among the Khmer refugees--reportedly numbering over 100,000 since 1975--and from the sizable ethnic Khmer community in southern Vietnam. The recruits are to be given special military training and sent into Cambodia to work for the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime. A [redacted] recently visiting Vietnam heard much the same story, although his account that 15,000 Khmer have already been trained and sent back seems far-fetched.

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The Khmer leaders have accused Vietnam of subversive activity in the past, but there is no hard evidence that such Vietnamese-supported activities are presently under way in Cambodia. Nevertheless, we believe that given Hanoi's increasing frustration with Phnom Penh's belligerent and uncompromising position on the border dispute, a Vietnamese decision to engineer and support a resistance movement in Cambodia cannot be ruled out.

Supporting an indigenous guerrilla force in Cambodia, in fact, may be Hanoi's most viable option. Its efforts to shut off Cambodian probes across the border by military reprisals have thus far been ineffective. Since the withdrawal of Vietnam's forces from the Parrot's Beak and other Cambodian salients in January, there have been persistent outbreaks of border fighting, with Phnom Penh stubbornly spurning Hanoi's entreaties to work out a diplomatic solution.

Although Vietnam shows signs of increasing frustration, there are strong arguments against a major military offensive against Cambodia. Vietnamese forces could easily reach Phnom Penh, but the capture of the largely

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deserted capital would probably be an empty victory, leaving the Khmer Government at large in the jungle to continue guerrilla warfare against the long, exposed Vietnamese supply lines. Whether Vietnam could occupy and control Cambodia--even with a puppet regime in place--is questionable. Hanoi no doubt must be tempted by reports of extreme deprivation and repression throughout Cambodia and by the apparent reception of Vietnamese troops as liberators by some villagers in the Parrot's Beak last winter. But the intense ethnic animosity that has historically marked Vietnamese-Cambodian relations and the tenacity of the Cambodian forces now fighting the Vietnamese should dampen Hanoi's hopes of facing a grateful and cooperative populace.

A major military campaign in Cambodia would seriously tax the already strained resources of Vietnam. Although the Vietnamese Army remains at its wartime strength, it has been significantly reoriented to economic tasks. The fighting along the border has already caused some economic dislocation; a major offensive and prolonged occupation would inevitably result in a notable slowing of economic development in Vietnam--the primary goal of the Hanoi regime.

But the political restraints on Hanoi are undoubtedly the most compelling argument against a military offensive. As irritating as Cambodian raids across the Thai border have been for Bangkok, the Thai have made clear that they do not favor a Vietnam-oriented regime in Phnom Penh. And the ASEAN governments without exception regard a Vietnam-controlled Indochina as a threat to the stability of the area. Attempts to implant a friendly regime by military force would severely undermine Hanoi's postwar diplomatic efforts to establish an image as a nonaggressive power seeking peaceful relations with its neighbors and would rekindle lingering suspicions of Hanoi's long-term goals in the region.

More important to Hanoi would be the further setback in its already strained relations with Peking. Hanoi clearly wants neither an angry and hostile China on its border nor unrelieved dependence on the Soviet Union.

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These considerations argue against even another limited military thrust into the border area--a move that offers no guarantee of forcing Cambodia to the bargaining table but would mark Hanoi as an aggressor. Nonetheless, continuing Cambodian provocations could generate increasing pressure from the Vietnamese military for another punitive attack across the border, such as that conducted last December.

The chances of a Vietnam-based resistance movement developing a viable base of support in Cambodia seem slim at best. The Vietnamese, however, have both experience and resources with which to work, including the Khmer now in Vietnam. Moreover, between 1970 and 1973, Hanoi engaged in a large-scale effort to develop the rag-tag Khmer Rouge insurgent movement into an effective and eventually victorious organization. During this period, Hanoi developed close associations with a broad range of personnel in the Khmer Rouge.

It is unlikely that pro-Hanoi cadre have survived the intensely xenophobic atmosphere in Cambodia, and indeed, last year's purge may have been aimed at cadre suspected of continuing ties with the Vietnamese. But there is an outside chance that there are elements in Cambodia, who--if given an opportunity--would cooperate with the Vietnamese. In any event, in view of the risks involved in overt military operations, Hanoi may see the mounting of a long-term subversive challenge to Phnom Penh as a relatively low-cost gamble that could in time pay off. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Laos-Thailand: Lao Foreign Minister Visits Bangkok

Lao Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Phoun Sipaseut returned to Vientiane on 25 March after a three-day visit to Bangkok. The highest-ranking Lao official to visit Thailand since the Communist regime came to power in 1975, Phoun called upon the Thai King and Prime Minister and held frank but cordial discussions with the Thai Foreign Minister. The visit symbolizes the desire of leaders in both countries to reduce tensions and improve relations.

The good-will visit of the Lao Foreign Minister apparently grew out of discussions between the Thai Foreign Minister and the Lao Undersecretary of State during the Economic, Social, and Cultural Commission for Asia and the Pacific Conference the week before. Since coming to power last October, Thai Prime Minister Kriangsak Chamanan has been actively attempting to improve relations with Thailand's neighbors. During the recent visit, both the Thai and the Lao officials emphasized their desire to build upon recent steps--such as the aviation agreement and the revival of Mekong River joint development projects--to strengthen mutual friendship and cooperation.

Discussions between the two sides were generally low-key and not polemical. The Thai rejected a Lao appeal for Bangkok to cease "provocative actions" along the border, however, insisting that they only reacted to Lao provocations. Both agreed to take "suitable action . . . to instruct local officials" to hold consultations when border incidents occur. The Thai also rejected the Lao request that they discontinue their Mekong River patrols. The Thai raised the problem of Lao refugees in Thailand, offering to assist in a voluntary repatriation program, but the Lao reportedly were embarrassed by the issue and not prepared to discuss it. The issue of Lao support for the Thai Communist Party and support provided by local Thai commanders for Lao resistance forces apparently was avoided.

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Agreements in principle were reached to expand trade, open additional border crossing points, and expedite the transit of goods destined for Laos. Subcommittees are to be formed to negotiate specific issues in these areas. Both sides appeared pleased with the symbolic value of the trip, and in an additional gesture of good will, Lao authorities subsequently released 11 jailed Thai. (SECRET NOFORN-NOCONTRACT-ORCON)

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Laos-Thailand: Muong Refugees

Weakened by years of fighting and shortages of food and medicine, and pressed by Lao and Vietnamese military operations, hundreds of Muong tribesmen have fled in recent weeks across the Mekong into Thailand on logs and makeshift rafts. The Muong, a fiercely independent people who live in the highlands of Laos, have a long tradition of resisting outside authority. Some of their forces are remnants of the US-supported anti-Communist army led by Vang Pao, which was disbanded when Vang Pao and his closest followers fled Laos in the late spring of 1975. Scattered groups of Muong in north and northeast Laos, like groups of lowland Lao and former royalist troops in other areas, have mounted effective resistance operations against the Communist Lao regime. Uncoordinated and armed with a variety of light weapons, these forces do not threaten the stability of the government, but their ambushes and attacks on local authorities have caused serious security problems. Some 25,000-30,000 Vietnamese troops have been brought into Laos to help Lao forces deal with the resistance.

The Lao and Vietnamese forces have intensified their operations against resistance groups in both the northeast and south in recent months. Assaults launched during February and March against Muong strongholds in the Phu Bia region, south of the Plain of Jars, apparently dislodged tens of thousands of Muong, including large numbers of women and children. Many are attempting to make their way to Thailand in the face of continued Lao attacks. Lao patrols have repeatedly fired on them as they crossed the Mekong, and thousands of Muong are reportedly hiding in the jungle near the river, waiting for opportunities to escape.

Approximately 40,000 of the 93,000 refugees now in camps in Thailand are Muong; a sharp new influx could create serious problems for Thai authorities. There could also be increases in the numbers of other Lao

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refugees in the near future because of projected food shortages and new resettlement plans designed to move lowland Lao from cities to "new socialist villages." Since late February, when several refugees turned back by the Thai were reportedly shot by Lao authorities, the Thai appear to have softened their policy to force the refugees to return. Although policies differ somewhat from district to district, most local Thai authorities seem to be allowing unimpeded entry to the Muong. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Indonesia: Easing of Tension

Tension seems to have diminished in the wake of President Suharto's reelection by the People's Consultative Assembly on 22 March. Students have stopped their demonstrations and returned to classes, and there has been no open dissident activity in Jakarta since the government's arrest of Muslim firebombers on 20 March. Suharto's choices for a new cabinet underscore his willingness to reward supporters and punish the opposition. Although disagreements with his former vice president and the Muslim-dominated Development Unity Party (PPP) have probably eroded Suharto's support, his immediate position seems fairly secure.

The calm that has set in--at least temporarily--at the University of Indonesia and the Bandung Technical Institute reportedly has raised the President's spirits. The quiet reopening of high schools in Jakarta--closed weeks ago after demonstrations--has undoubtedly contributed to Suharto's buoyant state of mind. He has been concerned that continued student criticism of his toleration of corruption could further damage his prestige and thus harm his chances for completing a third five-year term. His intention to prosecute some of the several hundred students detained since 20 January illustrates his determination to show that disorderly public conduct will not go unpunished. Nevertheless, the government's release of the remaining students combined with Vice President Malik's call for a student-government dialogue suggest that Suharto is assuming a more conciliatory pose.

The Muslim groups allegedly responsible for the firebombings during the week of Suharto's reelection--including an explosion inside the Assembly building--will not get off so easily. Security forces have arrested approximately 50 members of the Islamic Youth Movement and the Indonesian Islamic Youth Organization and continue to search for others; all will probably be

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detained for interrogation and then prosecuted. Although the bombings committed by these groups embarrassed Suharto, their actions may redound to his advantage. Security officials are attempting to establish-- [redacted] links between the two radical Muslim groups and the Islamic University Students' Association in order to discredit the Muslim opposition.

Suharto's choices for the cabinet, which he enlarged from 21 to 24 posts, illustrate three points. First, the makeup of the cabinet shows no inclination on the part either of the generation of '45--generals in their late 50s who fought for independence--to make way for the next generation of officers or of Suharto to move the old guard out. Few new and no young officers were offered posts, a factor that could eventually undermine Suharto's support among middle echelon military ranks.

The increase from four to 11 military officers in the cabinet is probably designed to shore up Suharto's support within the military hierarchy. Some high-level officers had expressed their unhappiness over the number of civilians and technocrats in the last cabinet.

Finally, Suharto's refusal to offer the PPP or the other nominal opposition party--the Indonesian Democracy Party--any posts is intended to show his displeasure with their opposition to some of his policies. Suharto's anticipated appointment of PPP Chairman Chalid to parliamentary chairman suggests, however, that he is not immune to using patronage to woo the opposition. (SECRET NOFORN)

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North Korea Chronology

Late February - early March North Korean mass organizations, including the trade union federation, the youth league, and the women's union, convene conferences to review programs and tasks for the coming year. (U)

6 March On the day before the start of a major US - South Korean joint military exercise ("Team Spirit-78"), a North Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman issues a statement condemning the exercise as a provocation threatening peace in Korea. The statement is the only official protest, although Pyongyang radio carries harsh commentary on a nearly daily basis during the course of the 11-day maneuvers. (U)

7 March Visiting Yugoslav President Tito holds talks with President Carter on a number of international questions, including Korea. (U)

8 March Party foreign affairs specialist Kim Yong-nam meets with Romanian President Ceausescu in Bucharest. The meeting coincides with reports that Ceausescu will travel to China and North Korea following his visit to the US in April. (C)

10 March The second "national youth festival" commences; it will extend to Kim Il-sung's birthday on 15 April. The first youth festival in 1976 began on Kim Chong-il's birthday, 16 February, and lasted until 15 April. (U)

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11 March At a meeting in Pyongyang So Chol, director of the Army's general political bureau, rails against the joint US - South Korean military exercise. (U)

Kim Chung-nin, former head of the party's anti - South Korean operations and demoted in 1975, is ranked among the regular members of the party's Political Committee. (U)

14-18 March Serbian party leader Kostic visits North Korea; he meets with Vice Premier Kye Ung-tae on 14 March. (U)

17-19 March Vice Premier Kang Song-san presides over a national meeting of city management activists. (U)

19 March Citing the recent joint military maneuvers in South Korea, North Korea announces that it is "compelled to postpone" the 26th working-level Red Cross talks scheduled for 20 March. Although long devoid of any substance, the Red Cross talks were the only remaining forum for official North-South contacts. (U)

21 March Press reports emanating from Peking assert that Chinese party leader Hua Kuo-feng will visit North Korea in the late spring. If the visit occurs, it will be Hua's first trip outside the country since he assumed the leadership in 1976. (U)

22 March Vice Foreign Minister Yi Chong-mok departs for a visit to Yugoslavia and other nonaligned states. (U)

24-25 March In his first publicized "inspection tour" for 1978, Kim Il-song visits Kangso county area of South Pyongan

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Province. Kim, observing the progress of construction at the site of the Tae'an heavy machinery plant, calls for its completion by October 1979. (U)

28 March

A three-page editorial article in the party daily, *Nodong Sinmun*, attacks US foreign policy, criticizing President Carter repeatedly by name. In branding the US as the "number one target" of the world people, North Korea seems to be taking issue with China, which for some years has publicly labeled the Soviet Union as the number one enemy. (U)

29 March

The Central Peoples Committee establishes a new industrial city of Tae'an in South Pyongan Province. The city, evidently centering on the site of the heavy machinery plant visited by Kim Il-song on 24 March, absorbs most of the area formerly under Kangso county, which is abolished. (U)

The Standing Committee of the 6th Supreme People's Assembly calls for the second session of the national legislative body to convene on 19 April. (U)

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